This book concerns two men, a stockingmaker and a magistrate, who both lived in a small English village at the turn of the nineteenth century. It focuses on Joseph Woolley the stockingmaker, on his way of seeing and writing the world around him, and on the activities of magistrate Sir Gervase Clifton, administering justice from his country house Clifton Hall. Using Woolley's voluminous diaries and Clifton's magistrate records, Carolyn Steedman gives us a unique and fascinating account of working-class living and loving, and getting and spending. Through Woolley and his thoughts on reading and drinking, sex, the law, and social relations, she challenges traditional accounts which she argues have overstated the importance of work to the working man's understanding of himself, as a creature of time, place, and society. She shows instead that, for men like Woolley, law and fiction were just as critical as work in framing everyday life.

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An Everyday Life of the English Working Class

Work, Self and Sociability in the Early Nineteenth Century

Carolyn Steedman
In memory of my father
Ellis Kay Pilling
1904–1977
Though we have properly enough entitled this our work, a history, and not a life; nor an apology for a life, as is more in fashion; yet we intend in it rather to pursue the method of those writers, who profess to disclose the revolutions of countries, than to imitate the painful and voluminous historian, who, to preserve the regularity of his series, thinks himself obliged to fill up as much paper with the detail of months and years in which nothing much remarkable happened, as he employs upon those notable æras when the greatest scenes have been transacted on the human stage ... it is our purpose in the ensuing pages to pursue ... [this] method. When any extraordinary scene presents itself, (as we trust will often be the case) we shall spare no pains nor paper to open it at large ... but if whole years should pass without producing anything worthy of notice, we shall not be afraid of a chasm in our history; but shall hasten on to matters of consequence, and leave such periods of time totally unobserved.

_The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling. By Henry Fielding, Esq. In Three Volumes_, T. Longman, B. Law & Son and 14 others, London 1792, Volume I, Book II, Chapter 1, Shewing what Kind of History this is; what it is like, and what it is not like.
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Figure 5. Sir Gervase Clifton's (only) recorded magisterial business in 1803. Nottinghamshire County Council: Nottinghamshire Archives. 

Figure 6. Clifton Hall, from Thoroton's History of Nottinghamshire, by John Throsby, 1797. © British Library Board. 

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Table 1. Incidents noted by magistrate Sir Gervase Clifton, c. 1770–1815

Table 2. Joseph Woolley’s expenditure in October 1801, 1803, 1804, 1809, 1813, 1815
Professor Stanley Chapman of Southwell, Nottinghamshire read my transcription of Joseph Woolley's diaries and illuminated them by his deep knowledge of Nottinghamshire's hosiery and knitwear industry and stocking-making communities. Above all I value his view that the Woolley diaries constitute an extraordinary document of ordinary life at the turn of the English nineteenth century. He was more than generous with his time and his thinking. I am deeply grateful to him. Professor Jeremy Gregory (Manchester) helped me (yet again) understand what I needed to know about the established church in the long eighteenth century – its lay personnel this time. My warmest thanks. Professor Margot Finn (UCL), Dr Emma Griffin (UEA), and Dr Laura Schwarz (Warwick) read an almost-there draft of this book for me. There is such ... shamelessness in asking friends and colleagues to undertake such heavy, time-consuming labour. But I did ask, and they undertook. By their acute comments, much criticism, and the disagreements among them about the relative weight to be given to Joseph Woolley over Gervase Clifton, they made it a much better thing than it was. It was very late in the day indeed that I understood contradictory advice as the most fertile ground for writing. I appreciate their interventions; I am very much in their debt. I am very grateful indeed to Joanna Innes, from whose interventions this book has also much benefited. Two anonymous readers helped me shape a final version. Only they will know how very much I owe them – how they saved me from myself.
A note on texts and transcription

There is discussion of Joseph Woolley’s and Sir Gervase Clifton’s notebooks throughout. The fullest account of Woolley’s is in Chapter 11. All quotations from their writing retain original spelling, punctuation, and capitalisation. I have not preserved original line endings. Ellipses indicate my omissions; square brackets enclose my additions, which are restricted to an occasional correctly spelled word or date, and [?] to indicate uncertainty about the texts. I have, however, imposed uniformity on the monetary values recorded by both. So when Woolley wrote ‘hair cutting 1 0’, I have always used ‘1s 0d’. I have attempted clarity with a magistrate, a clergyman, and a village all called ‘Clifton’.
Figure 1a. Map of Nottinghamshire, from the best Authorities, engraved by J. Carey, 1805